

Multiples and secondary school

This section was prepared from the Twins and Multiples page of Western Australia's Curtin University. A range of well-researched information about twins and education can be found at this site, via the link: <http://www.twinsandmultiples.org>.

Adolescent multiples and schooling

What is different about being a multiple at adolescence? For every young person, adolescence means three things:

1. Going from the top of the pecking order at primary school, to the bottom at secondary school, and probably losing the 'prestige' of being a multiple—if multiples are lacking good social skills, this may result in attention seeking behaviour to regain that attention.
2. An increased need for good organisation skills in high school, and the likelihood of twins doing different subjects, depending on their own interests and ability—this can cause problems when multiples tended to rely on their co-multiple(s) to support them, rather than having to be self-reliant. Undiagnosed ADHD in girls may become evident in secondary school, with the extra demands placed on organisational skills—this is a problem that must be addressed by the young person, the family and the school.
3. Becoming a young and independent adult—all adolescents have to become independent from parents, but multiples must also become independent from each other. And, individuality is a different concept between multiple-siblings, and singleton children and their co-multiple(s). Sometimes, in order to show their independence, twins may exaggerate differences between themselves, even going as far as one deliberately underachieving at school to emphasise being "different" from their co-multiple(s).

What should parents do? Often parents will be the only ones who observe undesirable or unexpected changes in their multiples. They need to inform and work with the school, using a holistic approach (which recognises the special relationship of the multiples) to get any problems sorted.

Differences in puberty

The nature of physical development at

adolescence may mean that one of a pair of twin girls may get her period years before her twin sibling, and the different development rates between boys and girls becomes even more evident at adolescence. These very normal variations in development can be very difficult for adolescent multiples. This quote from the Twins and Multiples page, says it all:

It has really torn my twins apart. They used to be so close. Now she is a young woman and he is still a giggly, active child. He does not notice it as much, but she says it is sooo... embarrassing to have him in the same form. We do our best at home to talk about how boys and girls develop at different rates, but the school needs to back us up. The kids do not even think the same way about the assignments they have to do and she and her friends (of course he is excluded) have much more mature ideas. I'm not sure the teachers recognise this. Yes they see the boys as being less mature than the girls. But they also see my son as being less adequate than his sister and that is not fair.

Achieving independence from one's co-multiple(s)

Twins and higher-order multiples have identified ten key concerns at adolescence:

- 1) Developing your own individuality and a sense of your own strengths and vulnerabilities
- 2) Coping with comparisons by others—and educating the others not to do this
- 3) Dislike or denial of being a multiple and what to do if one multiple

- ple is positive and the other(s) is/are negative about their status
- 4) Jealousy between multiples
 - 5) Coping with differences between multiples in physical development, in academic and occupational success and in friendships and relationships
 - 6) The balancing act between dependency and a close, supportive friendship
 - 7) Learning that multiples together attract attention, multiples apart need social skills to receive attention
 - 8) Parents who still want their offspring to be multiples first and young adults second
 - 9) Outgrowing parental stereotypes
 - 10) Expressing your individuality by doing the same as your other multiples.

Stereotyping and its implications in the family and at school

Fortunately, most multiples do not need help, but when required, both teachers and parents need to work together to ensure that the multiples get appropriate help, and without making reading success the whole focus of life at school and outside school.

And, when attention is focussed on the child with difficulties, the ones who are succeeding must not be ignored. All the multiples in the family need to know that their successes are recognised—the less able multiple who is

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We made the big journey home the following Wednesday. I think the hospital would have let me stay longer but Graham and I were ready to bring the boys home and get into our own routine. The boys were a bit unsettled the first night. In the hospital we just put them back to bed after each feed and they went to sleep but that night they didn't really want to settle. Although Joshua and Christopher are showing some slight differences, we have had to paint Joshua's toenail so that we definitely don't mix them up—particularly at the night feedings.

Kate was excited and wanted to help feed and hold the babies. She continues to be a great helper—fetching bibs, clean nappies, etc. It is great that all our visitors make a fuss of her as well.

The partial breastfeeding is working well. One baby has a full bottle of formula each feed and the other two need a small top up after their breast-feed. It requires at least two people to feed all the boys, together. Graham is working three days a week (a bit of a change from the original plan), so we are using our WINZ hours to have a lovely lady, through PORSE, coming in for 20 hours a week to help out.

We have also had heaps of help from family and friends, who have either come and stayed, or help out on a regular basis. It is not unusual for a visitor to be given a baby to feed or burp and everyone seems to love helping out.

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Joshua, Christopher and Liam are just over seven weeks, now. They wake once a night, doing 5-6 hour stretches between feeds. Often, one will wake before the others but they love sleeping in our bed so we just take them in there and they fall back to sleep until the others are ready, too. They have all put on lots of weight and are absolutely gorgeous, with their own little personalities developing.

We have only ventured out as a whole family twice, since the boys were born. It is quite an event getting four under two-year-olds ready to go out—loading them into carseats, getting

carseats into the car, taking them from the carseats to the pram and then doing the opposite on the way home, again. However, family and friends have been more than happy to come and watch the boys while they are sleeping, so Graham and I have managed to get out to brunch, and go shopping, etc., and Kate and I still go to Mainly Music on a Wednesday. It is nice to get some one-on-one time with her, still.

So, that is life with triplets. I have to say that with all the help we have received and because the boys are so good, life is a lot easier than I expected it to be. We have our fingers crossed that this continues!



Ready to go home—Kate (2), with Josh, Chris and Liam (L to R).

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finally achieving, and the more able child who has been achieving all along. No child should get the message that they'll never get praised, no matter how hard they try...

Choosing subjects and careers

What happens when it comes to choosing a career or the subjects at school or at university that will move you in the planned direction? Helping young adult multiples make such a decision is really a complex act, as it is often so final. Once they go to higher education, they are almost locked into their choice which may have been made on the spur of the moment to emphasise similarities or differences from the other multiples.

The people who really need to know about this are the vocational guidance

staff at school, as they can play a role in helping decide that this is what the young person wants to do and ensuring this has nothing to do with what the other multiple is or is not doing. The reality is that these staff may not even know this young person is a twin or higher-order multiples and this needs to be considered.

When a young adult says "I don't want to be a teacher" is this a simple expression of fact, or rather that they know their twin has chosen this as "their career". School staff in this situation need to be so sure they have all the information about the multiples at hand as they help that young adult work through their choices. It is not easy. One is trying to focus on what this young person is saying to you, while at the same time considering

what the other twin or higher multiple told you in private ten minutes ago...

Being independent by doing the same as your twin

Parents and teachers who emphasise the need for individuality in multiples may be concerned if they all decide to do the same things, to choose the same friends or hobbies or sports, etc. However, young people who (depending on zygosity) are genetically close or are identical and who have spent their lives together, may have very similar interests. Doing the same thing may actually be the best way of expressing their individuality.

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